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Letter dated 2 July 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to draw your attention to the following statement on the occasion of the formal start of talks between the Government of Colombia and the AUC paramilitary groups, issued on 30 June 2004 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex could be circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Dirk Jan **van den Berg**
Permanent Representative of the Kingdom
of the Netherlands to the United Nations

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Annex to the letter dated 2 July 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: English, French and Spanish]

Statement on the occasion of the formal start of talks between the Government of Colombia and the AUC paramilitary groups, issued on 30 June 2004 by the Presidency on behalf of the European Union

Recalling the Council Conclusions of January 2004 and the London Declaration of July 2003, the European Union reiterates its long-standing policy of support for a negotiated solution to the armed conflict in Colombia, including through direct engagement with those illegal armed groups prepared to negotiate a peace agreement. The European Union believes that there can be no purely military solution to the conflict in Colombia. It underlines, therefore, the importance of looking constructively at ways to move towards a peaceful settlement and the need for all illegal armed groups to engage in a negotiated process and to act accordingly.

The European Union confirms its readiness to assist in reaching a peaceful and durable solution to the conflict, within the framework of a credible and comprehensive peace strategy. It emphasizes the urgent need for the design and implementation of such a strategy and, in this regard, underlines the importance of the good offices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. It also underlines the importance of regular constructive dialogue between the Government and civil society.

The European Union welcomes the efforts of the Government of Colombia to seek the disarmament and demobilization of paramilitary groups and will follow with great interest the negotiations with the Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC) in the *zona de ubicación*. The ongoing engagement of the Organization of American States (OAS) through its Mission to Support the Peace Process in Colombia is an important regional contribution to this process. While supporting these efforts, the European Union deplores the continuing acts of violence and breaches of international humanitarian law by paramilitary groups, in violation of their self-declared ceasefire.

The European Union welcomes the efforts of the Government of Colombia to start a peace dialogue with the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), with the facilitation of the Government of Mexico. The European Union values highly the important contribution of Mexico to past peace processes in the region and fully supports its role as facilitator in any process with ELN.

The European Union repeats its insistence that all illegal armed groups should cease hostilities. The rapid release of all remaining hostages and kidnapped persons would be a very positive signal of the intention of the illegal armed groups to take the path of peace.

The European Union remains deeply concerned at the grave human rights and international humanitarian law situation in Colombia. It believes that these aspects, as well as the right of the victims of the conflict to truth, justice and reparation, must be high priorities on the agenda of any negotiation process, with particular attention

to the implementation of the recommendations of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The European Union also emphasizes its strong support for the work of human rights defenders in Colombia, as elsewhere, as demonstrated by the recent adoption of EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders. In the Declaration of Guadalajara, all the countries of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean expressed their full commitment to providing coherent and effective support to those individuals, organizations or institutions, including human rights defenders, working for the promotion and protection of human rights, in accordance with international law and United Nations General Assembly resolution 53/144. The European Union calls upon the Colombian authorities to refrain from statements which might endanger the rights of persons involved in the defence of human rights and to ensure compliance with Presidential Directive 7 of September 1999 and Ministry of Defence Directive 9 of July 2003.

The European Union looks forward to positive developments towards a resolution of the conflict in Colombia.

The candidate countries Bulgaria, Romania and Croatia, the countries of the stabilization and association process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and the EFTA countries Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, align themselves with this statement.